OUR FAITH

Published by The Unitarian Christian Fellowship

Purpose:--"To diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of pure religion, which, in accordance with the teachings of Jesus, is summed up in love to God and love to man."

VOL. 3 MAY, 1949 No. 8

Prayer

Eternal Companion of Man through all generations, we bless thee for all those who have come—and still are coming—to our world with a message of deep confidence in fearful and critical times; for those who have preached righteousness when unrighteousness seemed to be flourishing exceedingly; who have held up the banner of concord amid hatreds and confusion; who have declared the good to be the more real although the evil was more in evidence; who have seen the flags of dawn on the tops of the mountains when the valleys were still flooded with night; who have refused the bribes of the present moment and stood firm for the tribute of the unknown tomorrow; who have believed in their secret hearts that "men betrayed are mighty, and great are the wrongfully dead." And in these troublous and promising times of ours, we pray for a deeper understanding that thou dost live and strive and suffer in us all; that this is the unconquerable hope of the world, because with thee nothing that is wrong, nothing that is full of grief or empty of joy, can be final. Thou art from everlasting to everlasting, and dost touch our fleeting lives with a supreme and lovely significance. Lift up our eyes unto thine eternal hills this day, not that we may look away from the dangers, duties and delights of the earthly scene, but that we may view them more bravely and clearly, and may be better able to march on, making the plains of our dear common life more like a holy land. Amen.

V. T. P.

(From the Milton Calendar)

Bradford Will Address U. C. F.

The Annual Supper Meeting of the Unitarian Christian Fellowship has become one of the events of the May Meetings. We are most happy to announce that the Hon. Robert F. Bradford, former Governor of Massachusetts, will be the speaker at our meeting this year, at 6:00 p. m. at Old South Church Parish House, in Copley Square, Boston, Wednesday, May 25. He is a devoted and active Unitarian layman with a deep concern for the Unitarian church. He has a message which none of us will want to miss.

Reservations are limited, and are already being received. Tickets are 99c, and should be secured not later than noon, May 23, from Rev. Paul H. Chapman, Winchester Unitarian Church, Winchester, Mass.

Let Us Be Clear

HARVEY SWANSON
(Minister, Church of Our Father, Lancaster, Pa.)

In looking forward to the May Meetings this year, it is highly desirable that we do some clear thinking. It is, indeed, desirable that we should do a great deal clearer thinking than we did last year.

As the May Meetings began a year ago, wide publicity was given to a sermon by the Reverend Duncan Howlett on "This Is Our Denominational Hour of Trial." In it he warned against "a Unitarian orthodoxy" . . . "a rising voice demanding that we tighten our lines" . . . "the chorus of the

lonely, tired and the disillusioned," and he pleaded eloquently for the "free mind" principle as the only bond of union for our Unitarian movement — "those who would keep man's mind free because the free mind is one of the most precious of God's gifts to men."

As we approach this year's May Meetings, there are three points on which we should keep our minds clear.

First, regarding our origin, it is not quite accurate to say to Unitarians: "Let them remember that they were conceived in liberty and are dedicated to human brotherhood." Our Unitarian movement, in its origin, never dissociated liberty from God. The purpose of our liberty was the better to serve God. Nor was our dedication to human brotherhood merely that. It was more, much more. It was human brotherhood under the inspiration of the incomparable Jesus of Nazareth. In the interest of accuracy, therefore, it would be clearer to say: ". . . conceived in liberty, **under God,** and dedicated to human brotherhood, **in the spirit of Jesus."**

Second, we should not misunderstand the nature of science, and liken Unitarians to the "selfless men of science . . . our comrades in arms," and say, "We, like them, approach the subject of our specialty with an open mind. We, like them, have no preconceptions with which to start." This is not quite true of the scientist. If it were, then science would be indefensible against those who would pervert it—as the Nazi fanatics did pervert it in Germany. The scientist does have one very definite preconception, namely, that truth is discoverable, and that the quest for truth is the purpose of science. In the same way, the Unitarian religion, if it is to be religious at all, has one very definite preconception, namely, that **God is discoverable, and that the quest for God is the purpose of religion.**

Third, we must not evade the issue of the hour—a godless Humanism versus our historic Unitarian faith in God. Mr. Howlett, in the sermon mentioned, went on to admit, "complete freedom for all is anarchy—even a child knows that," and further that "we believe men should roam the entire reaches of knowledge in their search for God."

The real issue facing us, however, is one between those who insist, as the Unitarian Christian Fellowship does, that we are bound together **in our search for God** with the maximum possible freedom in that search, and those who insist that God is not there, and that it is foolishness to seek Him at all! It is the humanists' insistence upon throwing out God entirely that creates the issue.

Shall we have a fellowship that grants freedom to its members **in their search for God,** or shall we have a fellowship that merely grants freedom? If we choose the latter fellowship, it could hardly be called religious.

Statement

BY THE WOMEN'S ALLIANCE OF MILTON, MASSACHUSETTS

We are of the unanimous and strong opinion that at the present time no change should be made in the name of the General Alliance. We are not unsympathetic to the plea that the present name is cumbersome, although we would point out that Branch Alliances can and do abbreviate it for their own use. But we are convinced that, behind any arguments about brevity and convenience, another and more serious motive is at work in some minds. Plainly enough this motive is a dislike of the word "Christian" and a desire to eliminate it. It has not escaped our recollection that a few years ago the very short name of our denominational paper: "The Christian Register" was criticized for this very reason, and attempts were made to change the name. We believe that the delegates at the May meeting should look beyond the trivial question of convenience to the big question of tendency. There are circumstances in which a change of name indicates a change of character and a lack of concern for a good heritage. Christendom contains plenty of bigots who contemptuously deny that we Unitarians are Christian in any sense. If at this particular time we deliberately drop our nominal claim to be Christian, we shall go far to present the bigots with their own case on a platter. It always has been a glorious element in Unitarianism to affirm that a free Christian faith and fellowship is exclusive of none, whatever be their race, color or creed. Let

us not inadvertently narrow ourselves by cutting out this title. Let Unitarian women —whether they consider themselves Christian or non-Christian—march into the field of urgent matters. We shall vote solidly for: **No change of name at the present time.**

(Reprinted)

An Affirmation of Belief

WOODWORTH JAMES
(Member of Walpole Town Congregational Society, Unitarian, Walpole, New Hampshire)

I believe in God. An all pervading spiritual power, having three great and comprehensive attributes.

First, as I look about me at the world and evaluate my own personal experience, I am convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that I am living in a universe of law. Law upon which it is obvious that I can absolutely depend; to obey which shows wisdom and to disobey which invites penalties. Indeed when I consider the stupendous ramifications and nice exactitudes of universal law it would be difficult to avoid rendering homage to the author of it all. And so I must believe in a God of law.

But I cannot believe that God makes laws without purpose. It seems to me that there are evidences on all sides that he is hard at work as a builder of something momentous and that he depends on us as his co-workers. Furthermore I am going to venture a suggestion—that he is building a structure which might be called—the ultimate possibilities of the human soul.

Although it is not always easy to understand this principle, yet the alternative is the old conception of a "fortuitous concourse of atoms" and that, in the light of modern science, is unthinkable. Therefore I believe in a God of purpose.

As we are co-workers, so are we spiritually kindred and, in a measure, share with him in the third great attribute. It transcends the others, being in itself the highest law and the main-spring of purpose.

I refer of course to love. Love in the broader sense as well as in the narrower. But the love of God is something very difficult to describe in mere words, its realization being largely a matter of inner experience; and yet who has not felt the validity of such terms as "the everlasting arms," the "mercy of God" and the "peace of God which passeth all understanding"? Surely the beneficence and beauties of the visible world should mean something to me, and besides, I have great confidence in the homing instinct of man, that instinct which in all ages, all races and regardless of geographical location has caused human beings to turn in worship to a spiritual being higher than themselves. I believe in a God of love.

I was born long enough ago to have witnessed the closing years of the Victorian age, with its too sure assumptions and then, imperceptibly, almost without knowing it, I slipped into the so-called scientific age, with its unashamed materialism, resulting finally in two great world wars. And now, knowing it all too well, I have just entered the atomic age, sublime or horrible, as we are to make it.

Meanwhile I ponder that short, deeply significant phrase of the Psalmist as he also tried to express his belief in a Supreme Being. "God," he wrote, "is our refuge and strength."

Such, then, is my affirmation of belief in God.

A Letter

"As one who through a long life has admired and revered the great leaders of Unitarianism, and tried to follow, albeit with stumbling steps,—as such a one, I have been troubled and saddened beyond measure at what has been taking place in recent years. Not alone among the laity, even more on the part of many of those high in the councils of the church, the falling away from the fundamentals of pure religion, is a grief well-nigh unbearable.

"One feels almost apologetic today in saying that one is a Unitarian. But what about the Unitarian Christian Fellowship? That may be the morning star, for which we have strained our eyes."

ELEANOR P. MARTIN
(Milton, Mass.)

Proposed A. U. A. Reform

Rev. W. Wallace Bush and Dr. Rowland Gray-Smith have addressed a letter to all the constituent societies of the American Unitarian Association, stating that many of the recent troubles within the denomination are traceable to the Association's undemocratic structure.

They recommend a reform based on the following six principles:

1. The majority at least of the Board of Directors to be elected democratically by and as representatives of the people in their districts.

Note: At present the members of the Board of Directors are elected by a ballot prepared by the ten people who make up the Nominating Committee. The ballot is sent to churches and given to delegates attending the Annual Meeting or the General Conference. The Nominating Committee nominates only one person for each vacancy. Nomination by this official Nominating Committee has always meant election. And this Nominating Committee also nominates its own new members.

Under Principle 1 the personnel of the Board of Directors could not be determined by a small group operating centrally. And Directors would be under direct responsibility to people who know them and elect them. This principle of election by and responsibility to a district constituency is at the basis of all democratic forms of representative government.

2. Any members of the Board of Directors who may represent national organizations to be elected by the members of those organizations.

Note: At present the four organizations represented only nominate their representatives, and the Annual Meeting elects them.

3. All nominations for candidates to the Board of Directors or for any office within the association to be on the same footing.

Note: At present the By-Laws permit the making of non-official nominations, but the conditions laid down for doing so are not laid down for the Nominating Committee itself in nominating its own candidates.

Under Principle 3, all nominations will conform to the same constitutional provisions and all have equal standing. This is the principle of all free elections.

4. In making appointments, selecting personnel, and determining policies, no salaried officer to be a voting member of any committee the Board of Directors may appoint to make studies and recommendations.

Note: At present every key job may be, in practice, filled by the choice of the chief executive officer himself, after formal approval by a small executive committee. This fact has contributed much to create recurrent denominational sickness and crisis.

Under Principle 4, the function of the chief executive officer will be to execute the decisions of the Board, and any advice the Board may from time to time desire will be given by the special committees it appoints for the purpose.

5. The meetings of the Board of Directors to be normally open to any member or minister of any constituent society as listeners.

Note: At present no detailed report of discussions is ever given us. Nor is the voting record of each Director ever made available.

Under Principle 5, a "listeners' gallery" will insure the freedom of information essential to the health of a free fellowship.

6. Some part of our press to be free from control by the Directors.

Note: For the last few years the A.U.A. has been experimenting with a new system which combines the executive function with that of book publishing and journalism.

Under Principle 6, the journalistic aspect of that policy will be reviewed and modified in accordance with the democratic principle of journalistic freedom.

A Letter to the Editor

Bethlehem, Penna.
March 21, 1949

Dear Sir:

Please find enclosed a check for two years' subscription to "Our Faith" which to me seems to voice the real purpose for which the Unitarian Church stands as against the growing Materialism or Naturalism of the present day leaders, the Humanist group, and the free mind principle. I particularly liked the articles in the March 1949 issue. I find little of what I would call religion in the Christian Register.

The expansion of Unitarianism is being advanced but it is on a materialistic basis, and I fear any growth on such a basis will not be for the good of Unitarianism.

Cordially yours,
George E. Kinnier
Church of Larger Fellowship

The Human Touch

May every soul that touches mine—
Be it the slightest contact,
Get therefrom some good,
Some little grace, one kindly thought,
One aspiration yet unfelt,
One bit of courage for the darkening sky,
One gleam of faith
To brave the thickening ills of life,
One glimpse of brighter skies beyond the gathering mist,
To make this life worthwhile,
And Heaven a surer heritage.
—Author Unknown

"OUR FAITH" is published monthly (from October to May) by The Unitarian Christian Fellowship, 27 Marlborough St., Boston 16, Mass. Sybil H. Holmes, Chairman; Rev. Paul H. Chapman, 33 Glen Green, Winchester, Mass., Secretary.

Editor: Rev. Harvey Swanson, 538 W. Chestnut St., Lancaster, Pa.

Subscription price: $1.00 per year, payable to the Treasurer, Mr. Joseph E. Coulter, 101 Tremont St., Boston 8, Mass.

Contributions toward the expenses of "Our Faith" are gladly welcomed from all friends.

Extra copies of "Our Faith" in quantity may be secured, for distribution in local parishes, and for literature tables, from the editor, or from King's Chapel House, 27 Marlborough St., Boston 16, Mass.

Articles suitable for publication in "Our Faith" are welcome from all who wish to use these columns to express Unitarian Christianity.